

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Origin.....	2
United Way.....	2
Small Group Communication.....	4
Organizational Communication.....	13
Persuasion.....	17
Personality.....	19
Festival and Event Management .....	23
Reflection.....	26
Works Cited.....	28
Appendix.....	29

## **Introduction**

I have always enjoyed going to festivals and local events. One day I saw a poster for an upcoming event called Flavor of SLO. The poster described the event as a food, wine, and beer tasting afternoon at the park. The ticket price was reasonable, the location was at a park near my house, and the event was on a Sunday afternoon. What more could I ask for? Little did I know, I would leave the event with the inspiration for my Senior Project.

Flavor of SLO is created entirely by Cal Poly students as their Senior Projects. All proceeds benefit United Way, a non-profit in SLO which advocates making San Luis Obispo a better place to live through impacting the lives of everyone in our community. All of the students involved work directly with United Way representatives to make the event a success.

During the event last year, I discovered the creators of the event were all Cal Poly students. After learning it was a Senior Project driven event, I decided I wanted to be involved. As I was sitting on the lawn, sipping my wine, my head was flooded with ideas and ways to improve the event. I decided I needed to talk to someone about my interest in the project. I approached one of the Flavor of SLO team members and a United Way representative who discussed the possibility with me in more detail. Once the 2010 school year began, we met to discuss my involvement. I came prepared with my ideas for the event and improvements I wanted to make. I was lucky enough to have Rachel and Charlene, the United Way Representatives, offer me the Event Coordinator position for Flavor of SLO.

Once I was offered the position and opportunity to work on Flavor of SLO, I began formulating what my actual Senior Project would be. After working with Dr. Fahs, we came up with the task of writing a comprehensive paper that would include key communication concepts and variables I used to plan and execute Flavor of SLO.

### **Origin**

My interest in events began after working at Project Open Hand as a marketing and special events intern the summer after my sophomore year at Cal Poly. The position included promoting and preparing a 5K run/walk event with the San Francisco Giants. Participants would get to run the bases at AT&T Park as they finished the event. All proceeds benefited Project Open Hand, which is a non-profit in San Francisco that feeds terminally ill people in the city.

I was interested in this position mostly because of the marketing aspect. Through my time at Cal Poly, I have been trying to discover different career paths that I would enjoy and in which I could use my degree in Communication Studies. I fell in love with this position and could really see myself doing this line of work for the rest of my life. I was in charge of promoting the 5K run/walk event through in-park promotions, other fitness events, online resources and past participants. I was the main contact when it came to team leaders i.e., those who were in charge of a group of participants. I recruited corporate teams, organized team training sessions, and wrote team newsletters.

Through my experiences in this internship, I learned how challenging and fun promoting and producing an event can be. I find the work exciting and extremely challenging. I feel I excel in this line of work and have many skills that make me successful in this kind of position. Producing Flavor of SLO furthers my education and puts the Cal Poly motto “Learn by Doing” into action.

### **United Way**

United Way as an organization has many goals. Understanding their goals and how those goals relate to the goals of Flavor of SLO is imperative to making the event a success.

One of United Way's main goals is fundraising. Through fundraising, they are able to provide outreach to other nonprofits and enable more giving to charitable causes. Some of the main fundraising programs they currently organize are workplace giving, Kids Spree, and Imagination Library. Workplace giving is a program where individuals can choose to make a charitable donation out of each month's paycheck to United Way of SLO County. Interestingly enough, 65% of the overall donations United Way receives come from workplace giving. Kids Spree is a program where United Way gives approximately 150 kids in each city of San Luis Obispo county \$100 to Kohl's to spend on clothing and supplies for school. Imagination Library is a reading program which gives kids a new book each month from enrollment through the age of five for just \$50. They are trying to improve kids' chances of succeeding in middle school and graduating on time in high school.

United Way's overall fundraising goals directly relate to the work we do with Flavor of SLO. Flavor of SLO is a fundraiser where all of the money raised through ticket sales, raffle tickets, and silent auction goes directly to United Way of SLO County.

One of United Way's specific goals through this event is to target a younger demographic. Generally, their donor demographic is older because they are able to give financially. Currently, United Way's only connection to the student population is through the Muir dorm. Each Cal Poly dorm is linked to a nonprofit in the community. United Way would like to reach out to the student population in other ways. The team that plans Flavor of SLO becomes experts on United Way and spreads information about the nonprofit to the student community. Essentially, the Flavor of SLO team is one of the best connections United Way has to getting their name and cause out to a younger demographic.

The student attendees of Flavor of SLO are also part of the general outreach to a younger community. We tried to keep the admission price for students reasonable so they would be able to afford to attend the event. These students are donating to United Way through the purchase of their ticket, and hopefully becoming aware of what United Way does in their community.

### **Small Group Communication**

Small group communication studies how "...members...communicate with one another as they work together toward achieving a common goal" (Engleberg 7). The six Communication Studies students plus our two United Way representatives made up our small group. We went through the five stages in the development of a small group, different styles of conflict, group leadership, and goal setting.

The five stages a small group works through are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. The forming stage is when "Members cautiously explore their own goals in relation to the group and its goals" (Engleberg 32). The forming stage of our small group occurred at our first team meeting. The six Communication Studies students met over dinner to discuss the event in more detail. The other five prospective team members had a lot of questions for me. While we did not achieve much for the actual event, I was able to answer a lot of their questions and hopefully reduce their uncertainty about the project. All of the team members were polite and even apologized for bombarding me with questions. The avoidance of controversy was present at this meeting.

The second stage of a small group is storming. This is the stage when team members are highly aware of who is contributing what to the group. There is a feeling of competition with one another to figure out status within the group. This stage was when our

meetings started to progress and team members started volunteering to take on different projects. In this stage, everyone was extremely concerned about their image in the overall group. I remember specifically volunteering to help Maryn with the Facebook page. At this point in the planning process, our big push was for our marketing efforts. I felt bad Maryn had the heavier work load writing press releases, developing our Facebook page, and posting our event on community calendars. I tried to lessen her load and also make it known to the group that I was assisting someone with too much work on their plate. As we discovered through the planning process, the work load ebbed and flowed for different team members. At the beginning, Maryn and Mike had the most work creating our logo, designing the website and Facebook page, and getting the word out to local media outlets. In the middle of the planning process, Kendra and Dana had the most work contacting and following up with vendors about their participation and completing paperwork for insurance purposes. Toward the end, Kendall and I had the most work handling all of the little details that were planned ahead of time, but had to be coordinated and confirmed for event day.

Following this stage of cohesion is the storming stage which is known as the phase when team members work through conflict and find their place to help achieve the greater goals of the group. Conflict is defined as "...the disagreement and disharmony that occur in groups when differences regarding ideas, members, and/or methods are expressed" (Engleberg 175). Our group entered this stage after Spring break when team members started to feel more comfortable working with each other in the group. I think the main reason for this was the fact that we were working together more often to complete big projects. We were about two months out from the event after Spring break and that meant crunch time. After Spring break, the

extreme politeness that was present in emails left and the group was clearly ready to get down to business.

The performing stage is when team members “...focus their energy on doing the work needed to achieve group goals” (Engleberg 32). In this stage, the team had the mentality of “nose to the grind stone.” By this point, it was one month until event day and everyone knew projects that were not complete needed to be done. All team members had to make themselves available to help others complete their tasks. At this point in the planning process, the vendors list was short, bands were not confirmed, donations were minimal, and no tickets were sold. It was time for team members to stop being nice and focus on the job at hand.

After the rude awakening of how behind we were, people started stepping up to the plate and getting things done. I stepped in to help Kendra and Dana with vendors. I made a list of restaurants they had not contacted yet and reached out to them to see if they would be interested in participating. Through this process, I learned how hard their job was. I was not able to get one restaurant interested in participating. I’m glad I was able to try and help them, but I was not able to bring in any new vendors. Dana helped me with band ideas by contacting several music connections she had. She was able to book “Gravy Pups,” a local reggae band. Dana also helped by contacting a local hair salon for a donation. She was able to get two haircuts and goodies donated from Bluebird Salon. Kendall stepped in as well and contacted local downtown businesses for donations. Finally, I created a spreadsheet for each team member so they could sell tickets in person. We thought we might be able to get more interest in purchasing tickets if we offered to sell them in person. I thought this was very effective and was able to sell ten tickets in person.

The final stage of a group is adjourning where the members have reached their goal and the group starts to separate. In this stage, the group felt a sense of accomplishment. At our final team meeting, the group went around and discussed what ideas worked and what did not work in the planning process. Through this discussion, I felt a little sad that the whole project was over. When you dedicate yourself to a project that takes commitment, you go through a feeling of loss when it ends. Although I was happy we were able to produce such a successful event, I felt sad the project was over.

Throughout the stages of our small group, we encountered several types of conflict. Working in a group means conflict is inevitable and understanding how to engage in conflict effectively is essential to the success of any group. Our small group worked through substantive conflict and dealt with individual conflict styles.

Substantive conflict happens "...when members disagree about ideas, issue analysis, and potential solutions or actions" (Engleberg 175). The first conflict arose over who our event should target. The first two years the event was produced, all ages were welcome to attend. I liked the idea of making it a community event. United Way is an organization that focuses on making San Luis Obispo County a better place to live. Since the focus is on community, I would think the event should have the same goals. What I did not realize was the second year they put on the event, only a handful of kids actually came to the event. Unfortunately, they had invested money in providing activities for the kids to participate in such as face painting and balloon animals. What I failed to consider was the fact that kids need to be entertained by more than just food and live music. When I heard the low statistic of kid attendees, I understood and agreed that the event would be more successful if we limited the event to ages 21 and over.



Another example of substantive conflict occurred closer to the day of the event. This conflict arose over whether or not we should have a banner that says “Flavor of SLO.” In our team meeting, our United Way representatives did not feel it was a necessary component. I disagreed and felt it was necessary because I wanted guests to feel welcomed as they entered the event. I thought the sign would help guests find the location and draw attention to the event. We did not end up purchasing a banner. While it did not make or break the success of the event, I think it would have been a good investment United Way could use for years to come at each Flavor of SLO event.

As we moved through the planning process, different conflict styles arose. Mike tended to use compromise which is an “...approach that involves conceding some goals in order to achieve others” (Engleberg 181). The design of our posters and postcards was created by one of Mike’s friends who volunteered to help us at no charge. This was an extremely generous offer. The conflict arose when Charlene wanted to make several miniscule edits before the designs went to print. While these edits seemed like they would be easy to fix, Mike was struggling with asking his friend to make the edits. Even though she volunteered her time and creative energy, he knew she did not have time to make every small edit we wanted. Mike used the conflict style of compromise when he agreed to ask his friend to make the edits that were top priority items. Through email communication, I saw Mike compromising with Charlene by letting her know what items he was able to fix.

Another style of conflict seen within our group was collaboration. This style focuses on searching “...for new solutions that will achieve both the individual goals of group members and the goals of the group” (Engleberg 181). Throughout the planning process, the team felt our two United Way representatives asked too much of the group. At one specific

meeting, we were discussing how posters and postcards needed to get to our confirmed vendors. Charlene made it very clear that she expected Dana and Kendra to drive to each location and hand deliver the materials. This meant they would have to travel all around San Luis Obispo County on their dime. This did not seem fair at all so Kendall and I stepped in and offered to help them with the deliveries. We tried to work together to finish the task.

The final style of conflict I encountered was accommodation which is the idea that someone “gives in to other members at the expense of their own goals” (Engleberg 180). I tend to take the accommodation route when dealing with conflict. I am not a fan of confrontational conflict and tend to give in when tense or uncomfortable situations arise. I realize this is not effective at times, so this has been a challenge throughout my role as event coordinator. As mentioned before, our United Way representatives asked a lot of the team. Looking back, I wish I could have stood up for my team and let Rachel and Charlene know the work load was getting to be too much. Learning about conflict styles and being aware of what styles people tend to use are helpful when working together as a team.

### *Leadership*

Leadership is another essential component to the running of a successful group project. A group without a leader means there is a lack of organization. I took on the role of Event Coordinator, and that meant I was the leader of the Cal Poly team of students and the overall event. During the planning process, I tried to implement the 4M Model of leadership effectiveness. This model “...divides leadership tasks into four interdependent leadership functions: model leadership behavior, motivate members, manage the group process, and make decisions” (Engleberg 220).

The first aspect to this process is model leadership behavior. While I tried to implement the behavior of a leader, it was difficult and I was not always extremely successful. I tried to encourage the group and let them know they were doing a good job. Motivation is where I tend to excel. One of the unique aspects to this project is the role our United Way representatives take. They are not team members but do make the final decisions. At times, I wish they would have shown model leadership behavior. While we were struggling to find enough vendors for the event, Charlene was extremely tough on Dana and Kendra, our vendor liaisons. By the next meeting, Dana and Kendra had increased our vendor list by five. This was a huge increase and neither Charlene nor Rachel congratulated them. After the meeting I made a special attempt to let them know their hard work was appreciated.

The aspect of this leadership behavior that challenged me the most was to behave consistently and assertively. I think I behave consistently, but not assertively. I struggled with standing up for my group in times of conflict, and delegating tasks where I saw fit. There were times when team members were not following through with their job assignments. I failed to confront them and let them know the job needed to be completed. For example, our website had the wrong ticket prices and our website manager, Mike, kept forgetting to make the edit online. I felt bad telling him it needed to be done because I knew he had a busy schedule. In retrospect I wish I had been more assertive and asked him to fix the mistake. The reality is we were all busy, and the wrong ticket price on the website could make or break someone deciding to attend the event.

The second aspect to this model is motivating members. Fortunately for me, the group was motivated from our first dinner meeting. Each team member had a lot riding on the success of the event, since the event was the topic of each of our senior projects. Even with the

group motivated, I made sure to stay in contact with each individual member. I tried to offer help when needed and kept up to date on each of their individual projects. One example of this was when Mike needed help getting our poster reviewed before it went to print. I met with him and reviewed the poster before delivering it to Charlene for review. Another example is when Dana and Kendra were struggling with getting vendors interested and committed to the event. I stepped in and brainstormed new businesses that may be interested in the event as outreach and publicity. I wanted Dana and Kendra to know they were not alone in their vendor endeavors and that I was there to support them. Motivation was a relatively simple task for me, and I enjoyed being there for my team.

The third aspect is managing the group process. When prospective employers ask me about my strengths, I always mention organization. I am inherently an organized individual, so managing the group process was second nature to me. While I was preparing for our first meeting as a team with United Way, my roommate gave me great feedback and advice about her experience with group meetings. She said, "Have an agenda!" People want to know why they are at a meeting and they want to know there is a path and plan for the meeting. The worst kind of meeting is one that is poorly prepared and wastes people's time. I tried very hard to plan our meetings in an organized fashion and to make sure the meetings were a good use of everyone's time.

The final aspect to this model is making decisions. While I was the leader of the Cal Poly team, the six of us were all peers working toward the same goal. It was important to me for each of us to have an equal say when we were making decisions. At times our United Way representatives made executive decisions, but when it came to team decisions each team member had a say. One example of this decision making process was when Kendall and I decided we

would cancel one of our team meetings. At the time, we felt our time would be better spent working on our individual tasks. Charlene was not very comfortable with this idea, because she felt there were many items that still needed to be addressed such as print materials and entertainment. She left the decision up to me, but I felt she needed some uncertainty reduction so we held our meeting. Decision making can be difficult when speaking for a group of people, but it is an important concept to master when leading a group.

Goal setting is one of the final concepts I applied to this project. Goal theory helped me when thinking about how our group goals should be organized: “Effective goals are specific, are hard but realistic, are accepted by members, are used to evaluate performances, are linked to feedback and rewards, are set by members and groups, and allow for member growth” (Engleberg 293). Kendall and I met to set some preliminary goals before meeting with the group. We wanted to have a mindset for where we wanted the group before we got everyone’s feedback. We took into account the statistics from the past two events, and the fact that the event is only in its third year so we knew there was room to grow. We made goals for participants, vendors, entertainment, auction items, and volunteers.

At last year’s event, there were around 120 guests, so we wanted to increase this number to 200. We wanted a challenging goal, but also a realistic goal. Last year, there were eight restaurants, seven wineries, and three breweries present. When I first had my meeting with United Way, I knew I wanted to increase this number. Our goal was ten food vendors and ten beverage vendors. This goal is very close to the number at last year’s event, but we wanted to take into account the economy and the fact that many businesses are cutting back. If we had the same number of vendors or more than last year’s event, then we were successful. There were two bands at last year’s event. While this seemed like a good number for a three-hour event,

Kendall and I felt it would be more fun to include a third band to add more versatility in genres to appeal to our audience. The silent auction at last year's event seemed successful, but they only offered 20 individual items. This year, Kendall and I put together auction baskets and our goal was to create ten baskets for guests to bid on. They also included a raffle of ten items last year. This year, our goal was three raffle items. We wanted our focus to be on the silent auction instead of the raffle. Finally, our goal was seven volunteers total. We wanted two to help with set-up, three to help during the event, and two to help with clean-up. We did not want to ask our friends to volunteer, because we wanted them to come to the event and support our cause by attending.

Goals changed as the planning process progressed, but I am glad the planning team took the time to decide what our goals were for the event. Throughout the planning process, we could look back at our goals and see if we were on schedule.

### **Organizational Communication**

Studying the ways organizations are run and learning how to communicate within the environment of an organization are crucial when working and interacting in these different organizational environments. Understanding the communication climate, engaging in different styles of messages, and working through the stages of decision making were all important steps and concepts to master for the success of this project.

When I first entered the United Way offices, I was not sure what the work environment would be like. After a few weeks, I became aware of the communication climate, which is based on "...supportiveness; participative decision making; trust, confidence, credibility; openness and candor; and high performance goals" (Shockley-Zalabak 66). The overall feel is pretty laid back, open, and friendly. There are offices around the perimeter of the

building. Three employees have their own private offices, but I never saw their doors closed. Three other employees work in the middle of the building and sit at desks. If you were to stop by in the morning or early afternoon, the office is quiet with everyone diligently working on something. Once it gets to be late afternoon or early evening, you hear laughter and employees engaging in more social conversations. At first, I was not very comfortable being in the office. I would normally stop by in the early afternoon, so I felt like I was interrupting their work flow. After several weeks, I started to understand the overall feel of the organization and became more comfortable working in their environment. In general, United Way would be classified as a flat organization. This is a style where multiple people and teams work on multiple levels. There is not a sense of hierarchy, even though there are levels of experience and responsibility. I came to enjoy this work environment and could see myself thriving in an organization similar to United Way.

Working with United Way and my Cal Poly team forced me to not only learn about different messages, but master how to send and receive appropriate messages for each situation. The four different message types are task, maintenance, human, and innovation.

The first style of message is task. This style deals with activities of interest to the organization such as messages about improvement (Goldhaber 146). Task messages were present specifically at our meeting concerning setting goals for the event. United Way wanted this event to build on the past two events by improving attendance and overall money raised. The team wanted to make large improvements as well, so we could be responsible for a successful event from United Way's perspective and our own. At this meeting, the majority of messages sent were task related, focusing on how we could improve from last year's event.

Maintenance messages focus on policy and procedures to bring order to projects an organization is working on (Goldhaber 147). The majority of this style of message came from our United Way representatives. I saw these messages specifically at our team meeting when Charlene wanted us to give an update about our entertainment, vendors, and print materials. At this point in the planning process, the team was behind but aware of what needed to be done. Charlene made sure to make it clear to us what needed to be done and when. Unfortunately, she wanted our print materials earlier than we were able to provide them, but she made her expectations clear through maintenance messages.

Human messages are those that deal with feelings, interpersonal relationships, and self-concept (Goldhaber 148). I felt throughout the planning process there were not enough human messages. In retrospect, I wish the team had met one or two times in a social setting to build more of an interpersonal relationship. Once these relationships are formed, it is easier to interact in a formal setting. Sometimes I felt like the team did not know how to work together, because we did not know how each of us worked as individuals. There is a fine line between engaging in human messages and only communicating through human messages. I do not think the focus should be on interpersonal communication, but I think there needs to be interpersonal interactions in order to excel as a group.

Innovation messages are messages that work to produce new plans, new programs, and new ideas through planning and brainstorming (Goldhaber 149). Most of our innovation messages were concentrated on the design of our logo. None of us were big fans of the logo the team used last year, so we spent a considerable amount of time researching attributes a food logo should incorporate, and brainstorming what we wanted our logo to look like. Charlene and Rachel wanted us to design a logo they could use for multiple years. One of their



goals for this year's event was to come up with a logo they could use as a brand people would recognize. Our team took on this task and was able to create a beautiful logo designed by Mauria, one of Mike's friends. The innovation messages allowed us to communicate in a productive way and produce a logo we were all proud of.

In planning Flavor of SLO, our team made decisions as a group. When I took organizational communication, I learned there are four stages to decision making. This concept is explained as "...the process of choosing from among several alternatives" (Shockley-Zalabak 271). While making some of the first key decisions, we applied the four stages. The first step is orientation, where group members re-establish rapport and leave out the task at hand. While our group struggled with this at first, we gradually became more comfortable and would engage in conversations unrelated to the decisions we had to make. For example, one of our team members got engaged during the months of planning, so we congratulated her and got updates on the planning of her wedding. The second step is conflict where an idea is presented and the group comes up with two or three possible decisions. One of our conflicts was over what age limit we should make the event. I wanted to allow all ages and Charlene wanted to limit the ages to 21 and over. Another conflict was over how many bands should perform at the event. Kendall and I wanted three and Charlene wanted two. The third step is emergence, which is when group members combine possible decisions into one final decision the group can agree on. After considering the positive elements of a 21 and over event, such as an adult feel and less liability, I agreed and we decided to make the event 21 and over. Making the band decision came down to the number of bands we had confirmed by two weeks before the event. We were able to confirm two bands, so we stuck with those bands for entertainment. The final step in decision making is reinforcement, which is talking about the decision we have already made. As a way of reviewing

and confirming the decisions we made, we would discuss the final decision again to make ourselves feel more confident in our decision. When making decisions as a group, I think it is important to work through these steps so everyone is involved and is able to give their input.

### **Persuasion**

Persuasion was a technique I employed throughout the planning process. I used different concepts such as reciprocity, rejection – then – retreat, and social proof to entice and convince businesses to donate to the silent auction. While visiting businesses asking for donations, I learned they are solicited for donations roughly 25 to 30 times a week. I had to figure out what edge I could use to motivate them to want to donate to my cause.

The first idea that came to mind was to contact businesses I already had a connection to or knew friends had a connection to. I began with Vina Robles. This is my favorite winery and frequently taste and attend events there. I contacted their director of marketing who also handles donation requests. Unfortunately I was not able to speak with her directly, but left a voicemail and email that explained my connection to the winery and how I was looking forward to attending their Risotto Dinner. In this example, I employed the idea of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the idea that “...we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us...By virtue of the reciprocity rule, then, we are obligated to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like” (Cialdini 19). I thought this winery might feel more obliged to give to my cause if they knew I was a good customer they would want to keep happy. I was right and they donated a beautiful case of wine placed in a decorative box a bidder would be lucky to win.

My second idea for using the reciprocity rule was asking two of my team members to ask their bosses if they could get a donation. Mike works at Peet’s Coffee & Tea

and Kendra works at F.McLintocks Saloon. Both of these businesses could give us a gift certificate or merchandise we could use in a gift basket. I thought the managers of these businesses would feel a sense of debt to their employees and want to help them out in any way they could. Unfortunately, I came up with this idea too close to the deadline of our event so it was not successful. If I had thought of it earlier I think this could have been a great opportunity for a donation.

Finally, I observed the reciprocity rule in action when one of our United Way representatives, Charlene, contacted a vendor who decided not to participate at the last minute. Popolo Rotisserie Café was one of our first committed vendors. If vendors agreed to serve at our event by March 15<sup>th</sup>, one month before our event, they had the opportunity to be listed on all of our printed promotional materials. This included posters and postcards we sent out to past attendees, local businesses, and other committed vendors. Charlene used the fact Popolo had been listed on all of these materials as debt he needed to repay. This method worked and Popolo agreed to prepare food for the event.

Another persuasive tactic I used was rejection – then – retreat. The main game plan for getting donations was to first let Dana and Kendra contact possible donors to participate in our event. Once a vendor said no, I would swoop in and contact them for a donation. This idea of rejection – then – retreat is based off of the plan that you request something large and after the business turns you down, you ask a smaller request that the business will hopefully feel inclined to accept. I used this tactic a lot throughout my search for auction donations and had a very successful outcome. I had six businesses decline to participate in our event, but accept our second request of donating an item to our silent auction.

Social proof is the final persuasive concept I used when working on the event. This is the idea that “We determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct” (Cialdini 99). I used this idea when I assisted the vendor team with finding restaurants and wineries to participate. I would mention the vendors we had on board for our event and many times that was enough to urge another vendor to participate. I spoke with the restaurant “Lotus” several times. They asked me how many other vendors were participating and what they were planning on bringing. They wanted to know the other styles of restaurants participating to see if it was a group they wanted to be associated with.

We also used this tactic when setting the price of admission. We did research on how much other nonprofits were charging for their tasting event. Being on the central coast, there is a lot of competition for food and wine tasting events. Most other events charged at least \$45 to attend. We set our price at \$25 for students and \$35 for general admission if you brought your tickets before the day of the event, and \$30 for students and \$40 for general admission if you bought your ticket at the door. We wanted to be able to use the ticket price as a tactic when persuading people to attend. This was a successful tactic and we were able to persuade people to purchase tickets ahead of time based on the low admission price.

### **Personality**

I decided to take Personality as an elective course because I thought it would teach me a lot about where personality comes from and why individuals have very different personalities. While it did teach me these things, it also helped me mold my team for Flavor of SLO and evaluate communication road blocks between team members.

When I first went into my meeting at United Way, I had no idea it would be my task to build a team of students to produce the event. I relied on my skills and understanding of

personality to form my team. The social-cognitive theory to personality evaluates the way people think and symbolically process information (Burger 371). Under this theory, there is a term called observational learning which is defined as “Learning that results from watching or hearing about a person modeling the behavior” (Burger 484). I used this concept to form my team.

The first person I recruited was Kendall. I had a Recreation Parks and Tourism Administration (RPTA) class with her where we worked on a partner project together. Our task was to put together a silent auction basket for an RPTA benefit dinner. I knew her work ethic was strong and she had experience in event planning, so I knew she would be an asset to the team. Throughout the quarter, I was using observational learning by watching her behaviors and seeing how she handled projects similar to those we would work on for Flavor of SLO.

The second person I recruited was Kendra. I had had several COMS classes with her and at the time I was choosing my team, we were working in a small group together to prepare a discussion for our Intercultural Communication class. The two most important traits that influenced my decision to add her to my team were her positive and friendly attitude and her ability and interest in getting work done in a timely manner.

The third person I added to the team was Maryn. During my sophomore year, I had Small Group Communication with her but never had the opportunity to work with her. I observed her presentations where she was always well prepared, organized, and knowledgeable about each topic she presented. In fall quarter of my senior year, I had Internship class with her. Through her explanations and descriptions of her work at Verdin Marketing, I was impressed by her skills and what she was learning in her internship. While I was searching for more people to

join my team, I had Undergraduate Seminar with her. I was pleasantly surprised when she enthusiastically decided to come on board.

Mike and Dana were the fourth and fifth people to join the team. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to work with either of them in classes, so I had to rely solely on Kendall's recommendation. Instead of observing their work ethic, I used the hearing aspect of observational learning to understand their behavior. Kendall explained Mike as being a hard worker who was enthusiastic and interested in Flavor of SLO. I liked his enthusiasm and eagerness to work on the event. Kendall did not really describe Dana, but invited her to our first team dinner meeting to learn more about the event. I got to talk to her and hear her interest in the project and her willingness to work on any aspect. I liked her flexibility since this is a crucial trait when working in a group. Even though I was not able to rely on past experiences with Mike and Dana, I was able to learn about them through the hearing feature of observational learning.

When studying personality, I learned about many different approaches for evaluating personality and explaining why people react differently in similar situations. The two approaches I used when evaluating my group were the Humanistic Approach and the Behavioral and Social Learning Approach.

The Humanistic Approach focuses on the potential of each individual and the importance of growth and personal responsibility. The approach argues that each individual is responsible for what happens in their daily lives. There is nothing we have to do; we choose to do things. One main argument of humanistic psychologists is "that our behaviors represent personal choices of what we want to do at a particular moment" (Burger 290). We are not forced to spend time with certain people or commit ourselves to large projects; we choose to engage with these people and work on these tasks.

I can relate this concept directly to my team. As the planning process progressed, the work load increased as well. With the addition of mid-terms and other obligations, most of the team started to carry the attitude of the project being a burden. I wanted to remind them that this was a choice. Each one of them chose to work on Flavor of SLO; no one was forced to partake. After the stressful moments of planning, it was clear each member was glad to be a part of the team and proud of their decision to participate. It is in moments of stress and overload that people lose sight of their decisions.

The Behavioral and Social Learning Approach focuses on behavior that “can be observed, predicted, and eventually controlled by scientists” (Burger 358). It is an observation based approach that uses classical and operant conditioning to explain the reason why certain behaviors occur.

Classical conditioning is learning that comes from pairing a conditioned stimulus with an unconditioned response. I saw this behavior in my interactions with Kendall. Whenever I received an email, text message, or any request from Kendall, I would instantly act defensive. It did not matter whether I had read the message first or not. My conditioned stimulus was receiving messages from Kendall, and my unconditioned response was to act defensive. As the demanding requests came in, I started to associate Kendall’s requests with an automatic defensive response.

Operant conditioning studies the effect “consequences have on the frequency of behavior” (Burger 365). Under this concept is the law of effect, which is the idea “that behaviors are more likely to be repeated if they lead to satisfying consequences and less likely to be repeated if they lead to unsatisfying consequences” (Burger 364). I saw this concept

specifically in my interactions with Mike. I made many attempts to communicate with Mike and often got a negative response. With every negative response, I tried to alter my approach.

One specific example of this was when Mike was preparing to pitch our event to radio stations. He wanted information on auction items to entice the public to attend our event. He asked me about a hotel stay donation that I did not solicit. I tried to explain to him the item had been donated by a vendor without my involvement and that he should email the United Way representatives for details on the item. He responded by asking me to get him the details as soon as possible. His requests felt demanding with no attempt to listen to the information I had. I felt like I was trying to help him any way I could by giving him all the information I had on the item. It was clear my communication was not working.

After struggling in my interactions with Mike, I made an extra effort to communicate with him when we were at the Good Morning SLO event. We were at the event to present a “soap box” on Flavor of SLO. When we were preparing to get on stage, I thought Mike was mocking the group. In an attempt to joke with him, I commented on his mocking. He had no response and seemed confused by my comment. Unfortunately, my attempt to communicate was not successful. I continued to work on this through repetition, persistence, and an upbeat attitude

### **Festival and Event Management**

Festival and Event Management is a course under the Recreation Parks & Tourism Administration major. I decided to take this course because of my interest in event planning. Luckily for me, it taught me some very important skills I used to produce Flavor of SLO. The course taught me how to use different design software, how to manage volunteers, and produce a successful silent auction.



Design experience was something I was lacking going into this class. I have made power point presentations and I can create documents in Word, but I did not have any experience working in design software. One of the first things my professor told us was we needed to purchase some kind of design software based on our level of design experience. I had no previous experience, so I purchased PrintMaster, software for beginner designers. I was able to use this program when I helped with our preliminary logo designs. Without this course forcing me to work out of my comfort zone and learn how to create projects in design software, I would not have been able to contribute to our team's design needs.

As the quarter progressed, I became more ambitious and decided to download a 30-day trial of InDesign. This is much more advanced than PrintMaster, and it gave me more freedom to create documents without templates and guidelines. Once Flavor of SLO was over, I created a certificate for all of our vendors, silent auction donors, and sponsors to thank them for their participation. I was able to use design software to create this project.

Learning how to delegate, organize, and thank volunteers was another key skill I learned and was able to apply from this course. It may seem like second nature, but learning how to treat volunteers is not always an easy task. Kendall was able to recruit volunteers from United Way's Youth Board, San Luis Obispo Serve Day, and the Communication Studies major. We decided to have volunteers arrive in shifts so we could spread them out according to our needs. As volunteers arrived, we would check them in with a wrist band and "Live United" shirt. Then we would assign them a job such as helping vendors unload and set-up or break-down and load, overseeing the silent auction, selling raffle tickets, or checking in with vendors and relieving them for a break. Learning how to delegate and see areas that needed volunteers was a skill I learned through this course. Throughout the event, the planning team made sure to thank

our volunteers for their help and answer any questions they had. Once the event was over, Kendall followed up with our volunteers and thanked them for their service at our event. In our class, Kendall and I learned that it is nice to give volunteers something in return for their time. We brainstormed for several weeks about what we should give our volunteers. We ended up not giving them anything tangible, because we allowed our volunteers to attend the event at no charge before or after their volunteer shift.

The silent auction was a project I took on as one of my main responsibilities. Through this course, I learned how to solicit auction donations, how to make creative packages for guests to bid on, and how to set up a silent auction so it is visually appealing to bidders. The first companies I chose to contact were vendors who chose not to participate. My second tactic was to contact businesses that donated last year. What I learned was persistence really pays off. It was rare that I had someone agree to donate on my first visit or phone call. After two or more attempts, most businesses agreed to donate. After getting all of the donations I possibly could, Kendall and I went through our items and created packages. We tried to put together events or experiences people could bid on. Most of the time, people are interested in bidding on something they might not normally buy on their own. We put together “date night” packages and “weekend getaways.” Once it came to event day, we had to strategically place all of our packages so they fit on our three small tables. This was extremely difficult, but we were able to find enough space so we could stagger the packages for a clear view of the items. Without my event planning course, I would not have had the skills to produce such a successful silent auction.

### **Reflection**

Looking back on the event, I am very proud of the planning team, the goals we met, and the work we were able to achieve. As with any event, there is always room to grow. When we compare the metrics from last year's event and our team goals, we exceeded every expectation of not only the team's, but also those of United Way.

We set many goals based on goal theory, so they were challenging but attainable. Our first goal was to have 200 guests. We had 186 presale tickets with eleven of those guests as no shows. We had 37 guests buy tickets the day-of. This left us with a grand total of 223 tickets sold. Our second goal was to have ten drink vendors and ten food vendors. We had nine wineries, four breweries, and eleven restaurants serve at the event. Our third goal was to have three bands perform instead of two. We ended up only having two bands, and looking back I would not have changed this. Two bands were perfect to fill the three-hour time slot. Our fourth goal was to offer ten silent auction packages and three raffle items. We ended up offering 21 silent auction baskets and eight raffle items. Our final goal was to have seven volunteers. After assessing our needs, we ended up having 25 volunteers. With the weather being unpredictable, it was necessary to have extra hands to help us set up tarps as a preventive measure.

Now that the event is over, it is important to reflect on the reasons why Flavor of SLO 2011 was such a success. I think one of the main reasons was due to the fact I was able to attend the event last year. Being the Event Coordinator, I needed to have a vision of the event and how it needed to improve. Another reason was my choice in personnel. My team had different strengths which helped us cover a breadth of knowledge and experience. Overall, the team was dedicated and motivated to improve every aspect of Flavor of SLO.

I am extremely proud of my team and the work we were able to produce. The final money raised for United Way makes the event a roaring success from all perspectives. Last year, Flavor of SLO raised \$1,956 for United Way. This year, Flavor of SLO raised \$9,411 for United Way. During our final meeting, the CEO of United Way of SLO County, Rick London, made a special effort to let us know the impact we made. He said this was the first year Flavor of SLO raised funds that will directly affect the programs they are able to provide to our local community. We made a direct, positive impact on United Way and I could not be happier.

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## Appendix

### My Role as Event Coordinator

- I. Acted as main liaison between United Way representatives and Flavor of SLO team
- II. Organized, planned, and ran team planning meetings
- III. Researched and booked entertainment for Flavor of SLO
- IV. Logistics
  - A. Created site layout
  - B. Handled transportation needs and parking
  - C. Secured enough bathroom facilities in relation to number of guests expected
  - D. Reserved at least two security guards for entrance to the event and silent auction area
  - E. Purchased ice in advance for vendors
- V. Outreach
  - A. Wrote letters to guests from past Flavor of SLO events
  - B. Organized team presentation for Good Morning SLO
  - C. Created short presentation for the United Way Board Meeting
  - D. Made simple flyers about Flavor of SLO to pass out at a SARP event in Mission Plaza
- VI. Contacted businesses for donations to create silent auction baskets and raffle items
- VII. Contacted Cal Poly clubs and organizations for volunteers
- VIII. Managed the other five team members and their individual projects
- IX. Assisted other team members
  - A. Helped get our Facebook event page and organization page up and running
  - B. Supported the vendor liaisons by contacting other local restaurants